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The Mid-Week Service

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PREFACE

THIS little book is not an Inquest.

CHAPTER I

EYES FRONT!

MANY an inquest has been held over the prayer meeting. And sweet are the uses of an adversity like an inquest. It teaches much, and it usually interests. The far-famed inquest over the early death of the lamented Cock Robin never lacked a perpetual charm for our childhood, and seems to have served as a model for many a discussion of the prayer meeting. "Who killed Cock Robin?" is the question. "The minister with his long talks," says one witness. "The congregation with its cold indifference," says another. "The age with its worldliness," says a third. If a true bill is to be returned, it looks as though we should have to indict

a whole people, which Burke tells us we cannot rightly do. So many a treatment of the theme has been simply a variation of the lament, "Where are the snows of yesteryear?"

To say that the prayer meeting is dead would be a gratuitous piece of generalization to which we do not commit ourselves. It is far better to maintain the "judicial" attitude of the French minister at the English court, who reported to his government: "Some say that the Pretender is dead; some say that he is not. For myself I believe neither story."

The church is not nearly so much interested in Inquest as she is in Conquest. How to make all her forces into full strength regiments in the march and battle of the Kingdom is her first concern. Her command to each is "Eyes front!"

> Mid toil and tribulation
> And tumult of her war,

She is asking of her midweek service as of every regiment to face a changed battle front.

While no discussion of the prayer meeting which did not keep in mind the changed spiritual and mental conditions of the day could possibly be of value, to consider such changes as they affect the prayer meeting is not within the purpose of the present writing. Such necessary work has been excellently done. The present question is not, How did the prayer meeting come into its present situation? but, Where is it going? What may it be led to accomplish? This book hopes to partially answer the question with some suggestions of applied methods.

CHAPTER II

SOME PRAYER MEETING CONVICTIONS

1. A PRAYER MEETING is one of the logical inferences of Christian theology. It is not mere utility as a form of worship which has given it its place through the centuries. The doctrine of the Fatherhood of God has been equally responsible. As soon as a building becomes a home it needs something more than a reception room, an art gallery, and a conservatory. It needs a living room and it needs a nursery. The Christian Church, called into being by the revelation of the Father God, was born in a home, and radiated out from a center filled with tender domestic associations. The church should always bear the hall-

marks of its birthplace, retaining the gracious hospitality, unruffled peace, and warm-hearted love of a genuine home. It is not enough to supply these through the smaller gathering in the prayer meeting. They must be the unmistakable marks of the church itself, penetrating all like the very atmosphere of an orchard in bloom. Where this is lacking, as the common atmosphere which fills the whole of the Father's House with fragrance, it is almost impossible to cultivate the grace of real Christian fellowship in any particular department. But where it is present there is still need for some gathering in which the great doctrine of the communion of saints, which so easily dissolves into airy nothing, gets a local habitation and a name. What form it may take depends upon as many and varied conditions as does the form in which the fellowship of a

family finds expression and growth. That depends on the family, its members, temperament, its needs, occupation. But if a home is really a home, standing for more than board and lodging and comfort, there must be some means of the culture of fellowship, sympathy, and mutual self-giving. So if the church is a home, made so by every truth of the New Testament, it must provide some natural and familiar means of family council, so that the homely New Testament duty and grace of "doing good and communicating" and "greeting the friends by name" may not perish from the earth. A mid-week gathering will provide a strategic opportunity of strengthening the grip on the lives of men of what Dean Bosworth has called the four great bonds which tie them together—a common work, a common deliverance, a common experience, and a common hope.

2. Having said this, let us hasten to add that the midweek service has suffered grievously from mistaken loyalties. "Loyalty is the soul of religion," says Josiah Royce, and in a very suggestive and thoughtful book, The Philosophy of Loyalty, has claimed it as the soul of nearly everything else. His exaltation of a noble tenacity of spirit and will is a word always in season, yet loyalty of itself is never an unmixed good. Without the informing spirit of a mobile and open-minded intelligence it becomes the world's unrivaled obstacle to progress. Rufus Choate once said that John Quincy Adams was a "bull dog with confused ideas." Now, a bull dog with an unyielding grip has its uses in the world, but a bull dog with confused ideas is a dangerous thing to let run loose. Oxford has been pathetically called the "home of lost causes and mistaken loyalties." The

church has surely been a home of mistaken loyalties.

There has been the mistaken loyalty to a vocabulary. Through a deep and even holy desire to preserve the truths which have found, necessarily, only partial expression in certain words, many have fastened their loyalty to the words themselves—forever mistaking, like the Prince in Tennyson's "Princess," "the shadow for the substance."

There has been the mistaken loyalty to a method. Not fully comprehending the infinite variety of an unchanging God who yet fulfills himself in many ways, his servants have frequently endeavored to transform that glorious city with three ever-open gates on a side into a castle surrounded by a moat, with only one entrance over a narrow drawbridge.

The mistaken loyalty to a form has greatly subtracted from the possibil-

ities of the midweek service. "I can take care of my enemies, but save me from my friends," was the prayer of one discouraged, but discerning man. So, from the friends of the prayer meeting to whom fond memory continually brings the light of other days, loyal to the traditional form of meeting, its exposition and more or less hackneyed and irrelevant testimonies, the prayer meeting has suffered as much, at least, as from its enemies. More often than we care to think of we have allowed the truths of Him, whose mercies like his sunrises are new every morning, to become mildewed and musty, under the blight of an unvarying form for their consideration. There has grown up a mode of procedure in the service which is more like a solemn ritual than anything else. When the leader finishes and announces that the meeting is open, the real truth of the matter is often

that it is closed as tight as a drum, and he might as well say "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," for the meeting is already laid away, as far as lifelike response is concerned. Dr. Richard C. Cabot says, "No one ought to be satisfied to test his work by any easier standards than these: First, am I seeing all the actual facts, the ever new and unique facts as they come before me? second, am I tracing out as far as I can the full bearing, the true lesson of this movement or situation?" Might not a parallel test, equally hard and thoroughgoing, be well for those interested in conserving prayer meeting values? "Believing in the unique usefulness of the fellowship meeting, are we giving to it enough thought and consecrated ingenuity to provide it with varied and fresh forms? Are we making it so flexible as to appeal not merely to 'prayer meeting folks,' but to

widely different temperaments? Are we making it natural and easy for people to readily participate without constraint and without the least trace of cant? Are we making it touch life closely and definitely enough to be a real inspiration to service?"

3. Most churches do not need a continual meeting of the type so predominant in the New Testament—the "charismatic" meeting, a gathering for the exercises of spiritual gifts. The earliest Christian worship was a meeting for edification not only for believers but also for unbelievers. Every Christian had "received the Holy Ghost" and a "gift" as the "manifestation of the Spirit within him" (1 Cor. 12. 7ff.). From the lists in Rom. 12. 6 and 1 Cor. 12. 8 we learn that these gifts were of a manifold nature; but there was a distinction drawn (1 Pet. 4. 10) between the gifts of speaking and the gifts of ministry,

and those who had received the gifts of speaking took part in public worship. Saint Paul describes the service in 1 Cor. 14. 26, mentioning as different parts a "psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation, an interpretation." These parts are not rigid divisions and are not exhaustive, for prayer was an integral part of the service (1 Cor. 11. 4). This type of meeting for the employment of diverse gifts of speaking has naturally served as a model for the modern prayer meeting of the Protestant Church and there will always be a place for the exercise of such genuine and unmistakable gifts of the Holy Spirit. But it is open to serious question whether such a meeting can be used as a model in a church year after year to the largest edification of all concerned. Gifts which might be classed as gifts of prophecy, teaching, and revelation—from whatever variety of causes—are not common. And

where they do not abound, as is so often the case, to let the meeting depend so largely upon their manifestation is to limit very needlessly the range and possibilities of the service. There are clear evidences that in the early church the type of meeting easily tended to become one not altogether making for edification. He would be lacking in experience who would fail to know the genuine power in the unction of sincere testimony, revelation, and exhortation of the laity. But he would also be lacking in experience who would assert the continual need of the average church for a meeting whose main reliance is upon these "spiritual gifts."

4. The prayer meeting is not properly a matter for the conscience. It is not functioning rightly when it rests its claim on duty. "Put the prayer meeting on your conscience, brethren," echoes from many pulpits. The frequent result of putting the

prayer meeting on the conscience is that it irritates the conscience more or less, but does not bring the owner to the meeting. The anonymous vivacious author of the Confessions of a Clergyman has convincingly described a case of the prayer meeting being "put on the conscience": "A midweek service. Bells slowly tolling. Here and there women starting out, singly or by twos and threes, their faces expressive of a sweet, patient, sacrificial dutifulness. For every seven women a man—generally a meekish-looking man, or if not that, one possessed of a Lincoln-like firmness.

"In forty homes, meanwhile, a troubled air, as if the bells recalled privileges neglected. Then a distant sound of treble voices singing, with possibly a baritone above them. At this, a quite perceptible change in the stay-at-homes. Now that it is too late to go, they feel less guilty."

5. The midweek service should be a devotional meeting; but the word "devotion" used in this connection is a word of enlarging meaning. There is much of truth in the suggestive remark of Coleridge, "Make any truth too definite and you make it too small." The word "devotional" has often been made much too small by being made to cover too limited a variety of exercises. The words of Isaiah are aptly descriptive of the case—"The bed is shorter than a man can stretch himself in." Whether a meeting is devotional or not depends not so much upon what kind of things are done as upon the effect that is produced. The simple giving of information may have a high devotional value in that it may result in changed purposes or quickened ideas; while a meeting composed of prayer and exhortation may be decidedly unspiritual if it results in weariness and lack of interest. "The

sin against the Holy Ghost in the pulpit," says Sydney Smith, "is dullness." If that is true, the prayer-meeting room also has often been a very sinful place. "There is only one unpermissible pulpit style," he says, "the uninteresting." Dullness is one of the arch enemies of spirituality to be feared and warred against equally with other forms of vice, commonly rated more deadly. Whatever kind of midweek service results in new views of truth from unconventional angles, new stirrings of interest, or new impulses to service, is a strictly devotional meeting. And whatever does not so result, no matter how traditionally "devotional" its form and words, is not so.

6. In what may be called a "family council" type of meeting, the church has great spiritual resources. Nearly all of the midweek services described in later pages are of this general type.

It might be called a "round-table" type of meeting, did not even that suggest too much formality. The ideal, by no means always achieved, but never lost sight of, and frequently approximated in actual experience, has been to create the unconstrained atmosphere or tone of the home sitting room, when the various members of the family return home from the day's work, and the events of the day are naturally spoken of by all. An effective means of dispelling the constraint and reserve which hangs over so many prayer meetings like a miasma has been to furnish something to be done. The things done are often extremely simple, as in the case later described, where the people were asked to bring from their houses old Bibles and use them in the meetings. The result was an awe-inspiring collection of books around which were gathered the most tender and precious associations of life

to many present. But a far more important result was that several people, who could never be induced to make a speech in meeting, or "give a testimony," as the common phrase runs, showed their Bibles to the company and told to whom they belonged, to a mother or father, and very gradually they were speaking of the deep things of their heart's life, with as much freedom and naturalness as a man showing some photographs to some friend in his parlor. Such a participation is incomparably more beneficial to the one who speaks and all the others than a testimony given from a sense of duty or restlessness at seeing the meeting lag. These things to be done are never to be introduced merely for the sake of novelty, for there is no spiritual value in novelty of itself; and if it is in the least bizarre or extravagant, it quickly destroys a spiritual atmosphere. Everything to be intro-

duced into the prayer meeting must pass through this narrow gate—"Will it make some spiritual truth clearer, win it a readier attention, or build up some desired mood or temper of prayer and service in the attendant?" But where this test is conscientiously applied, and where the congregation come to know that the next meeting will be different from the last, that in it they will do something which will lead them on into freedom from self-consciousness, in that place the prayer meeting has been securely established in the affections, the only place it can permanently make its home.

CHAPTER III

SOME PRAYER MEETING STANDARDS

Cardinal Mazarin had only one test or standard in his judgment of men—a simple one of three words—"Is he lucky?" Under the thin veneer of churchmanship, the deeply rooted paganism of his heart clung to the fetish of the superstition of luck. The standard of a considerable part of the modern world can be expressed in a question of three words, equally simple and equally valueless—"Is it Big?" It is the child's first footrule: the loss of a penny is by a natural logic a greater calamity than the loss of a dime. The penny is bigger. Many men, "children of a larger growth," rarely ever ask any more penetrating

question of things. In The Turmoil, Booth Tarkington has pictured with great power the pitiable blindness of a city bowed at the altar of Bigness, with utter disregard of the effect of size on the lives of the people who make up the city.

So one is not at all surprised to find that a very frequent test of prayer-meeting success is the same crude footrule *size*. "The biggest prayer meeting in the city" is a standing line in the advertisement of a church in an Eastern city. "So many testimonies in so many minutes" is part of many a report, given with a ring, which unmistakably marks it as the very apex of success. And large numbers of people would regard looking at such manifestly good accomplishments with a critical eye as ultra fastidious. Yet one who approaches the subject from the angle of thoughtful experience will readily agree that

mere numbers, as regards the prayer meeting, are very much like the flowers immortalized by W. S. Gilbert, which bloomed "in the spring," but which, after all, had "nothing to do with the case."

The shrewd politician pays no superstitious homage to numbers—except as they appear in the ballot box. Tell him that the opposition candidate addressed an enthusiastic meeting of five thousand people, with much flag-waving and music, and the usual response will be a bland and confident smile. But tell him of a meeting in conference of leaders of different organizations in the city, be there only ten or a dozen present, he will at once be interested. The competent historian no longer judges by size. In 1874 Robert Lowe made a speech in the House of Commons in which he amused himself with belittling the Greeks and Romans. "The battle of Marathon," he said,

"was of less account than a modern explosion in a coal mine, which often kills a greater number than the nineteen hundred and twenty-nine persons who perished withstanding the hosts of Darius." On this John Fiske comments very pertinently: "The moral intended was that the newspaper is a better textbook than Herodotus. Now I can imagine that too exclusive attention to a newspaper, with the myriad disconnected items of fact and fancy, might so destroy one's sense of perspective as to blind one to the importance of an event upon which hung the whole future of European civilization. The battle of Borodino with seventy thousand killed is trivial compared with Marathon. *We cannot measure events with a footrule.*"[1]

The thoughtful Christian well knows it. Who would compare for a moment the importance of the feeding of the

[1] Dutch and Quaker Colonies in America, Vol. i, p. 218.

five thousand with that little meeting in an upper room in Jerusalem where only twelve persons were present with the Master, or even with the meeting with the woman at a well in Samaria, or with Nicodemus with two present? Let it not be inferred, on the other hand, that smallness of numbers has any magical advantage in a meeting. A large midweek service is a consummation devoutly to be wished and earnestly worked for. More than that, a somnolent satisfaction with small numbers is nothing short of the betrayal of a sacred trust. Nevertheless, the question that really signifies is never, How many were present? but everywhere and always, What did those who were present *do* as a result of being there? For it is perfectly clear that a large attendance may be due to one of several causes, bearing very little relation to its real value. It may be due largely to habit. In

some cases it is due to the fact that the midweek service is the chief or only through-the-week activity of the church. Thus a large attendance might not be a sign of unusual efficiency but of its very opposite, meaning that the church was attempting none of the other things it might do and ought to do. In other cases, of course, it is due to its meeting a genuine need and functioning with the utmost efficiency in the life of the church. But in every case the size is not the cause of value and can be taken as an indication of it only very roughly. The popular epigram that the "prayer meeting is the thermometer of the church" is the kind of misleading half truth that popular epigrams usually are.

1. The most obvious test of a prayer meeting is a fair one—"*Does it pray?*" This means more than to ask, "Are there prayers said?" In a little church in the Middle West the following

petition was offered every week for ten years, with very few exceptions: "Bless each and every member of the church in the lot whereunto Thou hast called him or her, and all the peoples of the earth from the heads of the rivers to the feet thereof." These words always occurred in a prayer, but it would be an unpardonable stretching of language to say that the meeting prayed. Leading a body of people in prayer, using that phrase in its largest sense of leading them through months and years into a real practice of prayer, is the most important as well as one of the most considerable undertakings to which a pastor can address himself. Nothing calls for more resourcefulness and patience and nothing touches the church's power so nearly at the center. It is an enterprise much like the uncovering of a spring. The hard crust of stereotyped phrases and traditional ideas and

misconceptions must be first removed, carefully and tactfully, as a rule, but sometimes the crust which forbids the flowing of the stream is so hard and set that it requires a process much like blasting. It is the most rewarding work a man can ever do. Once unlock the spring of a genuine petition and intercession and everything shall live whither the river cometh.

The French have an extremely suggestive phrase, which they use of a public meeting, when they say, "It marched"; the phrase catches splendidly the swing and movement of an exhilarating public gathering. Is there not room for a phrase descriptive of a prayer meeting, conveying something just as definite and real—"It prayed"? When such a description is a true one, the meeting reaches back across the centuries and clasps hands with the company of folks in Jerusalem of whom we read, "And when they had prayed,

the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and spake the word of God with boldness." The sequence is always true of a gathering. When it prays—it marches!

2. *Does it "domesticate" religious truth?* When the psychologist writes of consciousness he tells us of ideas and perceptions being divided according to their "warmth" into two great classes, the "me" and the "not-me." The things which have some personal association with one—his property, friends, reputation, thoughts—all acquire a warmth or feeling of proprietorship which constitute them a part of his larger self. It is the function of Christian teaching and preaching to transfer the substance of Christian faith from the "not-me" to the "me" part of men's minds. In a peculiar sense this is the business of the prayer meeting. By its topics

and their treatment, by the participation it elicits in as many and varied ways as possible, it should move the truths of Christian faith within the inner circle of what actually "belongs" to a person and enters in as constant ingredient in his daily life. Lord Bacon says of familiar essays that they are "most current for that they come to men's business and bosoms." The prayer meeting succeeds when it comes to men's business and bosoms. It fails when it stops short of that and reaches only their ears and eyes. A form of meeting which fails to establish this closeness of intimate feeling and relationship may be unimpeachably good in itself and still fail of its largest service. At the celebrated tea party given by the March Hare, the Hatter and the Dormouse, in Alice in Wonderland, the Hatter gazes regretfully at his broken watch and reproaches the March Hare angrily,

"I told you butter wouldn't suit the works." "It was the *best* butter," the March Hare meekly replied. The fact that it was the very best butter could not help him, if it was not butter at all which the works needed but something entirely different. Many a prayer meeting leader has striven to make his addresses better and better, and has made them of the finest quality, when what was needed was not the best kind of addresses, but something entirely different.

3. *Does it break up the molds of thinking?* This is a hard but fair test of a vital prayer meeting. The midweek council or conference gathering furnishes a rare opportunity for the breaking up of mental soil and the consequent possibility of new growth. Bishop McConnell says that many Christians are still-born—they never add anything to the range of ideas or practices which were theirs

at the time of their entrance into the Christian life. Instead of moving ahead on the straight road that groweth more and more light even unto the perfect day, they revolve in circles. It is this unprogressive circular character of the prayer meeting which has frequently made it a kind of spiritual merry-go-round. To furnish, even by the simplest means, some new approach to truth—some new angle of vision on duty—is as essential to life as plowing to a corn field. The landscape artist is continually concerned to get new glimpses of his subject to help him in his composition. He will frequently look at it from under his elbow, and even upside down. Such new "compositions," "puttings together" of life are indispensable to a living church.

4. "*Is it linked up to service?*" This is the fourth and greatest standard. The finest automobile constructed,

without a "clutch" which can be thrown into the machinery and relate the racing motor to the miles of road to be covered, is a poor affair. Has the prayer meeting a "clutch" which can be "thrown in" and turn the machinery of the church? For the "manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal." In service, the successful prayer meeting begins and ends. What gave the fellowship gathering of the early church an undimmed glow and zest was the fact that it was a workers' conference and fighters' assembly. As we read over the personal greetings in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans we get an idea of the company who made up the meeting in which the letter would be read, and we find ourselves among a group of people who came to the meeting from labor and the battlefield—Priscilla and Aquila, *fellow workers* in Christ, who

had risked their necks, and whose very house was a church; "Mary, who bestowed much *labor*"; Andronicus and Junius, *fellow prisoners;* "Urbane, our *helper in Christ*"; "Apelles the *tested*"; "Tryphena and Tryphosa, who *labor* in the Lord," and "Persis, who *labored* much." Is it any wonder that in such a gathering of active workmen there was an atmosphere of reality and alertness, which made it move in spiritual power? With a meeting, which, on the other hand, is on the order of Melchizedek, which has neither spiritual ancestors in the form of Christian service already performed, nor descendants in the form of service inspired and subsequently rendered, but which stands as a thing alone and self-sufficient, it is no wonder the meeting lags! The surest hoops of steel with which to grapple friends to the common gathering are the bonds of a common work. Then

it is, in a true and literal sense, that man is a "creature of large discourse, looking before and after" and finding in each direction the natural tongue-freeing interest of a worker in his work. The meeting which really inspires definite service, in whatever way, whether by filling the springs of Christian joy and devotion out of which all power for service ultimately comes, or uncovering some new corner of opportunity, is one that the King delighteth to honor.

CHAPTER IV

SOME PRAYER MEETING EXPERIENCES

The meetings described in the following chapter are outlined with a very modest purpose. They have not solved the "prayer meeting problem," as it is frequently referred to in painful accents. They are no sort of a panacea. They do not displace other types of meeting which have borne genuine and manifold fruit for years and which will, in the good providence of God, continue to do so. There are seasons and places where the largest good can be accomplished by the meeting being given an educational aspect and consisting largely of an address by the minister. So with other kinds of meetings which

deserve to hold a permanent place in the life of the church. It is simply as *variations*, with a quite general adaptability, that the meetings in this book are put forth.

They have at least the virtue of being real records of actual experience. They have all been used under conditions such as obtain in the average church and do not depend for success upon any extraordinary responsiveness among the people or extraordinary capability in the leader, for they did not have these conditions when used. As will be readily seen, most of the meetings have the common element of furnishing the attendants something to do as well as opportunity for "remarks," and the experience has been that the "things to be done" have served to make the things said come with more readiness, naturalness, and pertinence. Something of the element of a "surprise party" has been given

to the service, immensely strengthening the interest in the service on the part of the congregation, by imparting a real variety. Frequently variety in the prayer meeting has been sought for by means so external and superficial that the real character of the gathering remains unchanged. It has been like the boarder who complained to his landlady that the meals were too much the same, since she had macaroni for dinner every day. She promised to remedy the fault, and, true to her word, the next day there was a change. Instead of macaroni she had spaghetti! While the writers wish most earnestly to avoid creating the impression that the meetings achieved more than was actually the case, it can truly be said that they did much to exorcise the evil spirits of dumbness, constraint, and reserve.

1. The greatest result was in the *development of people.* With some peo-

ple the degree of response was not what was hoped for and expected. But with a surprising number the informal character of the discussions of themes, which bore directly on the lives at many points, elicited a participation not present before, greater in quantity, and marked with a genuineness and frankness which was both novel and gratifying. Folks grew in the grace of expression and the process of that growth added to the riches of the whole company. It is a pertinent word which Dr. J. H. Jowett writes: "The church is poor because much of her treasure is imprisoned; but she herself carries the liberating key. Our riches are buried in the isolated lives of individual members instead of being pooled for the endowment of the whole fraternity. A very large part of the ample ministry of the 'Koinonia' has become atrophied, if, indeed, it was ever well sustained.

'O, for a closer walk with God,' we sigh. O, for a closer walk with man, we may add, as well."

The wealth of suggestiveness and experience which are to be contributed by many, if once the safety deposit vault of their reserve and silence can be opened, is truly surprising. Frequently, it cannot be opened because the distance from not speaking at all to speaking on the greatest and deepest themes is too large a one to be taken at one step. Many of the themes and programs of the meetings described have served to put graduated steps between these extremes. By connection with things which brought no sense of spiritual self-consciousness the habit of freedom of speech is established, and once established it can be used to many ends. One man put his impressions in a very definite way at one time during a meeting. "Why, it seemed as though

the pastor must have pronounced the benediction at the beginning of the meeting. Everyone was talking just as they usually do when it is over."

2. The meetings have given *freedom from stereotyped speeches and prayers.* When the subject is so distinctly and definitely *one* thing, the many irrelevancies and stock speeches are by a natural and automatic process crowded out. And when a habit of more general participation has been established the time limit becomes a necessity and a blessing at once.

3. *Initiative* has been developed. Several extremely valuable suggestions for meetings have come from the people themselves as the service has fastened itself in their interest. This has had the double value of providing helpful meetings and of inspiring the people with a new feeling of ownership and responsibility.

4. An entirely unexpected experience,

but one rich in value, has been in the themes for sermons supplied. The interest and problems of the people have been disclosed with unaccustomed intimacy and fullness. If the ideal sermon should have "heaven for its father and earth for its mother," the prayer meeting has often supplied elements of both, particularly of the earth, in its disclosure of the conditions of people's minds and lives. Often a practical question discussed in prayer meeting has stirred the soil and awakened interest, affording a preparation for the preacher's pulpit message, on the same subject, as beneficial as a spring plowing before sowing the seed. The debate on "*Resolved*, That the world is growing morally and spiritually better," had such a decided effect. Those who had been in the meeting were already awakened with thought. The consideration of the question, "What are the

real possibilities of our church?" was extremely helpful to the pastor, preparing to treat the same subject, and furnished an audience composed of many who had already thought seriously on the theme and were keenly alert to consider it.

Two supplementary remarks may perhaps be well added. A strong Prayer Meeting Committee, to help plan and provide for the meetings, has been found not only a help but practically a necessity. It not only assists the pastor but makes for the democracy of cooperation, and is an outward and visible sign that the prayer meeting is not a harmless excrescence on the body of the church or a foible of the pastor, but part of the program of the church. It is a sad thing and a "bad-weather" signal when the Finance Committee of the church is the most important one, or perhaps the only one. The church whose gov-

erning board rarely ever acts on anything except the treasurer's report is usually acting on a deficit. Membership on the Prayer Meeting Committee can be made a post of real responsibility, work, and honor. And on its membership there may with great helpfulness be some who have previously had nothing whatever to do with the prayer meeting. Different members of the church, if possible a man and his wife, have frequently been asked to act as host and hostess at the meeting. This was done but occasionally, so that it never became merely a form, and it added to the informal and domestic character of the meeting. The duties were not defined, and different hosts and hostesses acted in different ways, except that all received the attendants with greeting and made themselves particularly responsible for introductions and sociability. Sometimes the meeting itself provided

some special connection with the hosts, as when the people went from one room to another, when they acted as guides, or when pictures or books were to be passed in the meeting—which they took charge of.

Frequently the host and hostess furnished flowers, though some were asked explicitly not to do so, so as not to make it an unvarying custom, perhaps burdensome. Some provided special music. Some furnished light refreshments, especially in summer. One couple furnished copies of the Gospel of John, appropriately inscribed with a personal greeting, at a meeting calling for the use of the Gospel. The total cost of the Gospels was a little over a dollar. Some furnished cards containing the greetings of the season—at Easter and Christmas and New Year's, etc.

CHAPTER V

THE MEETINGS

In considering the following plans it should be kept in mind that prayer and the expression of testimony are not omitted from any of these services. The suggestions and symbolisms used are but a guide and stimulation to them. Rather than prayer and testimony being crowded out, it is found that they become more natural, more vital, and certainly more to the point. It should also be noted that it is not the intention to suggest the use of these services one right after the other. This is not a year's program for the midweek service; these meetings are not offered as a substitute for the usual prayer meeting. They are suggested, rather, as types of meetings

to be interspersed with the usual meetings to add variety, interest, and naturalness to expressional religion.

"Twelve o'Clock and All's Well"

This was the midnight call of the old town crier, and furnished the motto and spirit of the first meeting of the year as the old year turned into the new. A large picture of the "Town Crier" holding his lantern and calling out the hour was lent by one of the members and hung on the front wall of the room, decorated with holly. The little Christmas tree in the room was kept over from the Christmas meeting and on its branches hung several packages of different sizes. The presidents or representatives of different organizations in the church were asked to be present and receive gifts for their respective organizations. After these were duly opened they were found to contain greetings

from the church to the different organizations, composed of appropriate Scripture, a wish for some definite thing for the organization to accomplish that year, and a prayer for help to do so. The greeting to the Sunday school, for instance, was in the form of a miniature manuscript roll after the old Jewish pattern on which was written 2 Tim. 2. 3, and 3. 14, 15, and the wish and prayer that it might strengthen its hold on the boys and girls of the intermediate grade. So with five other organizations. The president of the Ladies' Aid Society received a spool of thread and needles and the wish that through all the social work of the organization the spiritual purpose might be preeminent. From this beginning a natural and free conversation on the tasks of the church ensued. The aim of the meeting was to foster the spirit of unity and confidence.

An Evening with Old Bibles

Nearly every Christian family has among its possessions an old Bible around which hover very tender associations. In some cases it has come down through several generations; in others it is the father's or mother's Bible. Frequently such a volume shows the marks of long usage by some loved one. The congregation was asked for this service to bring such Bibles. The number of such Bibles in any congregation will be surprising. Those who brought them told to whom they had belonged, how they had been read, and then read from them—in most cases some marked passage. The progress of the meeting brought out the real connection between Bible-reading and character, and at the close the leader spoke briefly on the value of having one's own Bible for devotional reading; how

everyone has to make his own Bible by his own use, and the value of marking a Bible and so linking it up to particular times and experiences in life.

The Communion of Saints

A good-size map of the United States is placed in the front of the room, where all can see it; then each one is given a small United States flag. After the service is introduced each one is asked, separately, to go to the map, and stick the flag in the place, where they were converted, or first joined the church; they then may tell about that church, or their early experience there.

Another good meeting may grow out of this one by having greetings sent from this meeting to these old home churches, and when the replies are received, have the answers read in a subsequent meeting.

A Cooperative Gospel-Reading Meeting

Under the conviction that the average church member knows far too little of the contents of the Gospels as a whole, a meeting was planned which consisted wholly of reports on Bible-reading. The people were assigned different chapters in the Gospels to read and report on the contents of the chapters. The first evening was given to the Gospel of Matthew and Mark, eleven people being asked to read four chapters each and briefly tell what was in them, thus covering the forty-four chapters of the first two Gospels. Outlines of the two books had been put on the blackboard so that the movement of the Gospels could be readily followed. A succeeding evening was devoted to Luke and John. The meetings were entirely the people's meetings and were instrumen-

tal in securing a large amount of careful Bible-reading on the part of the congregation. The epistles of Paul were later treated in the same way.

My Favorite Portrait of Christ

This subject afforded an opportunity to study the character of Christ from what was to most people a new point of view. Copies of Perry Pictures—prints of the most famous portraits of Christ—were provided at one cent each. They were freely circulated among the audience so that all were able to examine them. After a few remarks by the leader different people told which of the portraits did the most justice to their idea of the Master. The spiritual value of the meeting was in the way it brought out appreciations of the character of Jesus, particularly his courage, strength, and manliness, which many portraits of him utterly fail to suggest. The consensus

of opinion was strongly in favor of the modern painters rather than the classics, with Hofmann in his "The Boy Jesus in the Temple" and "Christ and the Rich Young Ruler" decidedly the favorite. Holman Hunt, Plockhorst, and Tissot were next in order, with a very general liking for Thorwaldsen's sculptured Christ. The prints were given out to be taken home as remembrances of the meeting.

A meeting similar in character was held later in the year on the subject, "My Favorite Madonna." Pictures were used in the same manner. It afforded, among other things, an excellent opportunity to consider the natural causes of the rise of the worship of the Virgin Mary, and in view of these causes, the necessity of keeping our conception of Christ so filled with sympathy and humanity that all that the heart craves of tenderness may be found in him.

Groups in Prayer

After the people have assembled, and had about ten minutes of introductory service, the meeting is divided into groups under leaders. These leaders know before the meeting that they are to lead a group, and what their topic is to be. Each leader takes his group into a separate room, and for twenty minutes they counsel and pray on their topic. Then all return, and the closing fifteen minutes of the service is given to reports of these meetings by the leaders, or by any one of the group, if they desire to speak. It is found that this type of meeting may get many more to take part than the average meeting, and also that there is a definiteness about the prayers, because of the subjects that are assigned. So many prayers do not get anywhere; but in this service, where blackboards were used in some of the

rooms, there was a definiteness about the prayers, which was splendid.

The February Family

This meeting is held at a proper time in the month of February. In this month occur the birthdays of many of our famous men. We all are familiar with Lincoln and Washington, but there are many others, whose birthdays might be celebrated, were it not for these outstanding characters, such as, for example, Ruskin and Longfellow. A very interesting service can, therefore, be developed by simply assigning to different people the task of bringing in very brief biographies of these prominent characters. It is always best, we have found, to have some anecdotes of these lives brought rather than just the bare facts. There is nothing so stimulating as the study of biography, and especially the study of men who have

risen from meager circumstances to prominent places in the world. The month of February is rich with such characters, and should not be overlooked.

What Books Have Really Helped You?

With two or three assigned to lead in the discussion, people were asked to name two or three books, whether fiction or any other, which they had really enjoyed and loved, and which they felt had been permanently helpful. The aim was not to compile a list of suitable books to be read, which would be quite easy, and perhaps quite useless, but something better—a real experience meeting on books actually read and prized. The pastor's opening remarks were on some books which had been formative influences on great lives, such as the influence of Law's Serious Call on

Wesley and David Brainard's Journal on the life of Henry Martyn, etc. The list which resulted was printed by the Young People's Society of the Church with the title, "The ———— Church Five-Foot Shelf of Books," and was distributed to the congregation. A few letters on the subject from representative people in the city were read in the meeting.

The Real Elements of My Life

Under this general head were held what were considered by many the most profitable meetings of the year. They were introduced after the "family-council" idea had become firmly enough established and the informal atmosphere prevalent enough to make such meetings profitable because genuinely real. A description of one will suffice for five or six. There is a world of meaning, always well

worth pondering in connection with preaching and the prayer meeting, in the old Greek myth of Anteus: Anteus was the son of Terra, the Earth. He was a mighty giant and wrestler whose strength was invincible as long as he remained in contact with his mother Earth. He regained vigor whenever his feet touched her. The prayer meeting is such a wrestler. When it touches the earth and comes into real contact with people's lives it waxes strong. These meetings "touched the earth" with new vitality as the result. One evening the subject was, "What are the real elements of your Happiness?" The people were asked to name not the things which all would agree *ought* to make folks happy, but what really *did* contribute to their happiness. Of course every life has its own reserves which are for itself alone, and no attempt was made to have intimate secrets disclosed. But

apart from things sacredly personal, much help is to be had from the discussion of the question from the standpoint of actual experience. It was significant that only one person mentioned money, and many spoke of things usually considered minor matters. Similar questions taken up at intervals were:

What do you most fear?

What is the most difficult thing you ever did?

What have been the most helpful influences of your life?

What is the unpardonable sin against you: that is, what do you find it most difficult to forgive?

What is the most impressive thing you ever witnessed?

A Reason for the Faith That is in You

Two meetings were held under this head which had great liveliness,

but which included a very serious purpose. In the first the pastor posed as an unbeliever in Christianity. He stated his assumed position as a nonbeliever and made the strongest possible case against the evidences of Christianity. The audience was invited to show him his errors and bring out points in favor of their belief. The discussion easily led the audience to consider anew the reasons for their faith. In the second meeting, held some time later, the minister argued from the standpoint of the man who believed nominally in Christianity and who sympathized with the church, but who would neither attend nor join it. The people were invited to persuade him to join, and were incidentally shown how the church appeared to many on the outside, and the typical attitudes and arguments which the church had to overcome.

Story Meetings

Occasional meetings of a very simple character with the reading of stories as their principal feature have shown devotional value. Of course this, being the chief end of every meeting, must be furnished by the story itself. In some of the meetings discussion and testimony followed the reading. Others closed simply with song.

L. H. Bugbee's beautiful Christmas story, The Man Who Was Too Busy to Find the Child (The Methodist Book Concern), was read at a meeting two weeks before Christmas. An added effectiveness was secured by having the room darkened and lighted with candles. Another Christmas story which can be used effectively is J. E. Park's The Man Who Missed Christmas (Pilgrim Press). The subject of prayer has never been treated more exquisitely, perhaps, than by

Henry van Dyke in his story, The Source, published in The Blue Flower (Scribners). J. M. Barrie's tender description of his mother, Margaret Ogilvy, "How My Mother Got Her Soft Face," lends itself admirably to the purposes of a prayer meeting.

It would be an unpardonable blunder to forget, in this connection, the first and greatest Story Book in the world. From it on one evening the book of Ruth was read by four young women, each reading one chapter.

What I Would Do With a Million Dollars

In opening this meeting three people were asked to make brief talks on what they would do with a million dollars. It brought out very clearly what a complicated problem the betterment of the world is; the danger of doing harm with money, even with the best intent; the superiority of pre-

ventive over rescue work, and the necessity of reaching final causes rather than symptoms of evil. A blackboard was used to catch the suggestions offered. One speaker made an original and illuminating comment when he said that with a million dollars he would doubtless make a fool of himself. One concrete result was the light gained on what to do with the one dollar which a man had, rather than with the million which he did not have.

If the World Forgot to Pray

A fresh approach to the fundamental theme of the value of prayer was made when this question was the subject: "What would happen if everyone forgot to pray for a year?" The subject, as always, had been announced in advance, and the leader made no introductory remarks beyond asking if there would be any noticeable

difference in the world at the end of a year if no one prayed. Most of those present agreed that there would. They were then asked to suggest in just what forms that difference would be shown. A large number of interesting suggestions were made which were noted on a blackboard. Among them, to quote a few examples, were the certain lowering of standards of personal action; weakening of conscience; blunting of sympathies and consequent slackening of charitable and social service; lowering of the tone of home life; cherishing of bitter feelings and hatreds which are frequently dissolved in prayer; increase in sickness, due to melancholy and gloom, increase in the number of suicides, withering of the church, etc. The meeting came to an effective climax, when after these things had been discussed, the pastor pressed home the question whether it was not true that the reason so many

of these things do happen, as much as they do, is because so many people actually *do* neglect to pray? The meeting seemed to give prayer a new "place in the sun."

Debates

It has been found that some people who will not speak on their own initiative will take part in a friendly and informal debate. The plan for this service has been to have two persons present the points on each side, followed by general discussion and a vote, not upon the manner of presentation, but upon one's belief regarding the question. Profitable subjects will readily suggest themselves. The four following have proved helpful:

Resolved, That the world is growing morally and spiritually better.

Resolved, That capital punishment should be abolished.

Resolved, That war has done more evil than intemperance.

Resolved, That the money spent on foreign missions could be spent with better results in this country.

These questions are all old, purposely chosen for that reason. One aim has been to get questions upon which most people already have opinions, and so make the debates less of a scholastic exercise, involving the looking up of material in a library, and more in the nature of a conversation. Such questions, with great religious import, are the only ones which can profitably be considered. It need hardly be added that it is necessary to avoid anything that would remotely raise a personal or partisan issue.

The Inner Circle

Before this meeting the seats of the room were arranged in three circles, the inner circle being smaller than the

outer two. The people sat in the two outer circles; the inner one being reserved to use at the latter part of the service. The Scripture and brief talk of about five minutes by the minister were on the Inner Circle among the disciples. The testimonies and prayers held to the thought of fitness for this close relation to Christ.

Ten minutes before the close of the meeting the minister announced that he was about to open the inner circle, and wanted all who would to enter it with him. The condition of the entrance was as follows: upon coming to the entrance of the circle, each one was to pause, and pray either silently or audibly, and at that time decide, with God's help, to renounce something in his life, which he knew to be contrary to God's will, or to take some definite advance step in his relation to him and his service.

Almost all in the room entered the

circle, and kneeled in the prayer of consecration. This meeting was deeply spiritual, and could not be held often, yet it can be held at regular intervals, and when announced, has brought a large attendance.

Good Friday

On Good Friday the main auditorium of the church was opened in the afternoon and evening for meditation and prayer. There was no public program or set exercise at either time. The people had been invited to come to the church and spend some time in quietness and prayer. In the evening there was soft music on the organ from time to time, mostly old and appropriate hymns. A great many people spent from fifteen minutes to half an hour or an hour during the evening in the church, and while the value of such a quiet prayer period cannot be appraised in any way, there

were many expressions as to its helpfulness. It may be objected that this is a Catholic form of service; but surely it is unwise to allow such a simple following of the example of the Master, who retired so often to a quiet place to pray, to be regarded as the peculiar property of any particular branch of the Christian Church.

Christian Ideals and Different Occupations

"Let every one look not on his own things but on the things of another." This was achieved in part by several meetings, at each of which a talk was given by some one on his vocation and its relation to the Christian life. The meetings were in a series under the general heading, "Earthly Professions and the Christian Profession." The things discussed were the particular difficulties of the different lines of work and

what were felt to be their peculiar rewards, other than financial; also their peculiar temptations as well as opportunities which they offered for Christian service. Among those who spoke were the following:

A teacher.
A doctor.
A lawyer.
A merchant.
A mechanic.
A minister.
A housewife.
A missionary.

An Evening With Old Hymnals

The minister in his calling had discovered that there was quite a supply of old hymn books in the music cabinets of different homes. For this service he asked that these old Hymnals be brought to the church and used. Many were prompted to speak of something in connection with different hymns and songs. The leader

spoke of the strength of many of the old songs on the side of individual experience and also the need to be supplemented on the social side, portraying the enlarging conception of the kingdom of God. "It Is Well with My Soul," for instance, was contrasted with a later hymn, "Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life," as showing the necessity for individual experience to be completed in social aspiration and service.

Behind the Duplex Envelope

The prayer meeting the week before the Every-member Canvass was made for church expenses and benevolences, took the form of a general congregational meeting held in the church auditorium. In its outward form it resembled an entertainment rather than a prayer meeting, but, looking back over the results, there was no one who did not consider it

one of the most beneficial midweek services of the year. The aim was to represent by tableaux just what results were accomplished in filling up both sides of the two pocket collection envelope every Sunday. A large sheet was hung up in front of the platform. This sheet had been marked and lettered in exact duplication of one of the church envelopes, with one side for local expenses and the other side for missions and benevolences. Behind this curtain had been placed a partition dividing the platform in two. A member of the finance committee explained that when the curtain was drawn aside the work of the church at home and abroad would be portrayed. On the "home" side of the platform, when the curtain was drawn, was an actual Sunday school class in the Junior grade in session, standing for the educational work of the local church. On the other side,

representing the missionary part of the envelope, were six girls and their teacher in costume, portraying a Sunday school class in Japan. (Admirable costumes may be rented from the Missionary Education Movement, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York, for nearly every foreign land, at fifty cents each.) The next scenes shown were a meeting of the Ladies' Aid Society on the "home" side, showing a few ladies sewing for a near-by hospital, while on the foreign side some young men represented a scene in a mission hospital in China.

This was followed by representations of worship at home and abroad. A home pew of worshipers was shown on one side, and a mass movement meeting in a village of India on the other. The organ played softly Heber's hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy." Other scenes helped to make the matter-of-fact and business like envelope seem like a

door which opens on a world teeming with life, when it is conscientiously filled.

A Study of Paul's Parishes

Three meetings were given to a consideration of Paul as an itinerant pastor, his parishes, and the problems they offered. The three parishes taken up were those at Corinth, Ephesus, and the churches in Galatia. Thessalonica also gives a fine opportunity for suggestive study. Bible references on the history of the parish, its composition and Paul's relation to it, from Acts and the epistles, were given out and read. Various persons had been asked to tell about the problems of the parish, for instance, in dealing with Corinth, the factions, the problem of sin within the church, the fanatics (Judaizers), etc. Then the means Paul used to lift the parish out of these hindrances and handicaps

were discussed, his counsels (for example, the 13th chapter of First Corinthians) were read as throwing light on some permanent problems of every church.

Other meetings growing out of the general lack of knowledge on the part of the people with reference to Paul's missionary journeys, were called "Little Journeys with Paul," in which an evening was given to Paul's missionary journeys. Maps and blackboards were used and the hardship of the journeys, etc., gave many valuable lessons for counsel.

The Early Candlelight Service

Keeping in mind the old custom of bringing candles to the house of God that it might be lighted, a service was planned called an Early Candlelight Service. The seating of the room was circular and nothing but candles were used to light the room, the

candles being placed about the walls and on the minister's table. In the center of the room was a table on which a number of small candles formed a cross.

Two thoughts were emphasized in the Scriptures and the minister's brief talk: that the source of every man's light is the cross, and that each is commissioned to be the light of the world. Accordingly, after testimonies and prayers, which all bore on the subject, the minister led the symbolic service, in which each person took a candle from the cross, signifying whence his light came. After this a brief prayer was offered, then, as all stood in a circle, the minister, with his candle lighted the first to his right, and that one lighted the one to his right, and so on, until the whole circle was lighted. It made a very beautiful service, and as impressive as beautiful.

A rather unusual thing for a prayer meeting was that there was not a prayer or testimony but which bore on the subject.

Living Up to Our Hymns

Why do people sing certain hymns so heartily? Why do their hearts warm and their eyes glisten at the sound of the old familiar hymn? Quite often because it is old, and brings back the memories of the past; quite as often because they love the tune. The real thought and meaning of the words are often overlooked, and we declare enthusiastically in song what we neither believe nor live.

A service with splendid results may be had by taking some of the familiar hymns and going carefully over the meaning of their thought, with the idea of living up to these high ideals and noble sentiments. Let this question be prominent: What would a

stranger think of me if he knew me only by the hymns I sing, and how near would he be to a right estimate of my character?

If I Were the Preacher

Two very live meetings may be had by taking the two subjects, "If I Were the Preacher," and "If I Were the Congregation." At the first meeting the people are asked to tell what they would do were they the minister; how they would run the church; what things they would emphasize, etc.

At the second meeting the minister talks on what he would do if he were a member of the congregation. Of course no one can tell just what he would do in some one else's place, but it is good to put yourself, as nearly as you can, in the other man's place at times, and sympathize.

Like the Church Program meeting,

these bring out good suggestions, and, at least, get people to thinking.

Relatives in the Bible

What people in the Bible are your relatives? The question itself arouses interest. In looking at the various Bible characters you find some that you like better than others. Peter appeals to one; John to some one else; Paul to another, and so on. Everyone has his favorites. Quite often we like this character or that because he is related to us by some characteristics. A very interesting meeting, therefore, can be developed, by asking the people to look through the Bible for familiar characters, who are related to them in this way. In one such meeting one man felt that his nearest relative was the one who fell asleep in church under Paul's preaching. Some would not confess it, but they might find that Isaac

was their nearest relative, because he did the same things that his father did; built the same wells, and told the same lies.

The Last Supper

This is a service in preparation for communion. Without allowing the meeting to be so serious that it is sad, the people are asked to consider the important things they would like to say to their friends, were this their last supper with them. Of course it is at once evident there would be many things we would say to loved ones that would be too sacred for a public meeting, yet there are some things which may well be said and with more fitness in the light of their being farewell words.

An old-fashioned Methodist love feast goes well with this meeting.

Church Program Night

The idea of this service is to get

the people to plan a church program, as they would have it. A blackboard is used, and people are requested to suggest the items of importance, which they feel should make up the program of the church. One of the interesting things about this service is that some people have never thought of a church program. The service will give many people a larger idea of the scope of the work which the church is undertaking, and very often brings out some splendid suggestions for the minister.

It will be found advantageous to take up at this service such a program as the missionary program of the church, which is very essential, along with the duplex envelope system. It may also be well to consider some of the overlapping of church work by different societies in the church, and see if suggestions cannot be brought out whereby some central authority

can plan the church program so that this can be avoided.

Reception to New Members

This night is a regular feature. Communion is held once every two months, and the first Thursday night prayer meeting after communion takes the form of a reception to new members. Certain ones are asked to receive; they are the host and hostess for the evening. They stand at the door with the new members, and introduce them to all who come. The evening is more of a home evening, and very informal. After the usual prayers light refreshments may be served. This may be made one of the very best of the midweek services.

Cloud of Witnesses

Almost every church looks back with pride to certain ministers and laymen who have been strong influences in

the church life, and almost every church has pictures of such men and women. It is a service both interesting and meaningful, especially for the young people, to get out these old pictures, and hang them about the walls of the room, then have those who knew them tell of their life and work; the thought to be kept uppermost in this meeting is the responsibility that rests upon us because of the faith and labors of our fathers and the challenge of their expectancy.

How We Have Taught Religion in the Home

We hear a great deal about religion in the home, though not so much as we used to. Certainly, anything that will help to emphasize the value of religion in the home is needed. In this meeting people are asked to relate the ways in which they have tried to teach religion to their children in

the home, what methods they have used in family prayers, or any other suggestions that the people have to offer with reference to successful means of bringing religious instruction to the lives of their children.

Church Union

A very informal symposium was held one evening on the subject of "Church Union." Four laymen—a Congregationalist, a Baptist, an Episcopalian, and a Methodist—described briefly what things in their polity were different from the other denominations. Each made suggestions as to how he thought a common basis of union in the matter of organization might ultimately be reached. The design of the meeting was to bring out from the people themselves the fact that the greatest part of the task of church union, a substantial unanimity of spirit and faith, and has already

been achieved. Such a meeting will inevitably bring up the possibility of a better present federation in the local field.

Progressive Meeting

For this service several rooms of the church are arranged so that in them various needs of the church are presented. If there are not many rooms in the church, then sections of rooms can be screened off. A leader is selected to be in each room to explain the need, as the people pass around visiting the exhibits. It is well if the minister leads the people about, although, if there are too many, there may be other leaders. At each room or place the people pause, while the work to be done is presented and prayer is offered for this particular need. After visiting all of the rooms, the people assemble again for general prayers and counsel for the church work.

Building a Character

A blackboard is used at this service, and after a brief talk, in which the minister explains the service and emphasizes the importance of character-building, the people are asked to build a character in the meeting. Anyone is asked to suggest an important characteristic that he thinks ought to make up a part of the life of any character. Very soon many of the people will be stating certain characteristics that to them are essential to an ideal life, and before the service is over there will be some splendid material with which to construct a life. After all the suggestions are in, the leader can condense these suggestions into the essential characteristics that go to make up a true personality. It will easily be seen that there will be plenty of material in such a service as this to bring

out splendid testimony and prayer. Some of the very finest lessons of life can be developed through such a means as this, and lessons that take hold of people because of this pedagogical method of bringing them before their attention.

Religious Conversation

At this meeting, after the introductory part of the service, the people are divided into small groups of four or six, each group is assigned a leader, and it is better if these leaders have had a meeting with the minister previously, so that they will have some idea of the way to begin the conversation. After the grouping the minister assigns a religious topic to each group, and the people simply talk together, as they would in their homes, about anything that they may think of with reference to this religious topic.

Like the meeting of the groups in prayer, the informality of this service brings out much more discussion than is usual in the average prayer meeting.

All the News That's Fit to Print

Especially to those living within reach of New York city, this heading, "All the news that's fit to print" is a very familiar one. It will be found to be an interesting service if at the prayer meeting a newspaper is printed. Of course no printing can be done, but the people are asked to bring to the service some poem or some prose selection or some clipping from a newspaper, which they consider to be important, and then these things are all put together and a newspaper is formed.

My Best Vacation

Let the people discuss in an informal way what they consider their best vacation, and tell why, then let

the minister sum up the thought of the evening in closing.

Use just before vacation time.

Church Budget

Let the midweek service vote the church budget. We do not mean this to be final—but let the people here indicate what they think the money of the church should be spent for, and how much for each item. There are some within the church who do not think it very democratic, and feel that the officials are a rather closed corporation. It will do them good to express themselves, and may bring out some good ideas for the officials of the church, as well as furnish good thoughts for real prayer and testimony.

Mirrors

Taking Paul's thought that in this life we see in a mirror, there can be developed an interesting meeting by con-

sidering the different types of mirrors we look into in life. Some people look into mirrors that magnify, and they appear to themselves greater than they are. This is the mirror of conceit.

Some look into mirrors that minimize themselves, so that they appear less than they are. This is the mirror of lack-of-self-confidence.

Some people look into a glass that confuses, so that large things in life seem small and unimportant things appear important, and so on.

Interest can be quickened by having these different kinds of mirrors at the service to illustrate each point. Attention can also be drawn to large mirrors of this type that most people have had experience with in places of amusement.

Amusements

Amusements make up so much of people's lives—so much more than we

sometimes think—yet there is great confusion in the minds of many as to just what are profitable and what unprofitable ways of recreation and amusement. A meeting of frank discussion on this subject will very often clear the matter for some people, and be encouraging to the younger people who are in attendance.

Patriotic Meeting

Many suggestions will immediately come to anyone's mind with reference to patriotic decorations and arrangements for a patriotic meeting. This meeting can be held near the thirtieth of May, or the Fourth of July, or even near the time of the birthdays of some of our great statesmen, such as Lincoln or Washington. Flags, of course, will from a large part of the decoration, and patriotic music and readings will enter into the service. Very small flags may be used to give

away as souvenirs of the meeting. This meeting is especially good, as it may be made to appeal to the younger people of the church, even the boys. The Scouts can be used to enliven this meeting—both the Boy Scouts and Camp Fire Girls.

An Art Gallery Meeting

Perry pictures, reproductions of the old masters, especially those with lessons of religion and life, are used for this service. Such pictures as "Breaking Home Ties," "The First Winter of the Puritans," "The Legend of the Holy Grail," "The Angelus," etc., should by all means be included.

The pictures are arranged in series to bring out character lessons, then each series is hung or pinned up in different rooms of the church; or, if there are not many rooms, then in sections of one room. One person will have charge of each of the groups

of pictures. The congregation is then divided into several groups, and they pass around, stopping in each room, or each section of the room, where the person in charge explains the pictures and draws the lessons from them. This will require thirty or forty minutes, and then all reassemble for general prayers.

Family Prayers

Under this simple wording the Thanksgiving meeting was announced and held. It aimed to live up to its title and give more than a remote suggestion of that atmosphere of a home where family prayers were a regular, natural, and real thing. A fireplace was set up at the front of the room with red electric lights in it to represent the family hearth (where a real fireplace can be used the effect, of course, is much better). Some of the older persons of the parish were

asked beforehand to conduct the family prayers. After the people assembled they were broken up into several groups and went to different rooms, and there these leaders conducted family prayers, just as they would in their own home with their family. The meeting was a simple, old-fashioned Thanksgiving meeting, with the particular feature of emphasizing anew the value of home worship.

"By the Christmas Fire"

The fireplace and a small Christmas tree were used in connection with the meeting the week before Christmas. It was designed to make a lull in the rush of Christmas preparation in the home, stores, and the church, and afforded an opportunity to remember what it was all about. The best-loved of the Christmas songs were sung, two lullabys by some of the Sunday school children, and several old carols

by two or three members of the choir. Three selections were read by different people. The Christmas story from Luke, part of the Cratchits' Christmas dinner from The Christmas Carol, and the last two paragraphs from Henry van Dyke's The Meaning of Christmas, were read.

A Chain of Prayer Across the Ages

It will be noticed that many of the meetings here described have been on the subject of prayer. This has not been due to accident or lack of proportion, but to the conviction that the distinctive function of the prayer meeting is the cultivation of the prayer habit. The purpose of this particular meeting was to show the universality and range of prayer down through the ages. Two books were used in preparing for the meeting—The Meaning of Prayer, by H. E. Fosdick

(Association Press), and A Chain of Prayer Across the Ages (Dutton). Most any collection of prayers would do equally well. The introductory part of the service consisted of the reading of prayers representing different ages, different experiences, and different needs. The Meaning of Prayer contains a fine selection of prayers voicing different emotions in prayer, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, petition, intercession. To show these different aspects of prayer, prayers by various men were read—Saint Augustine, Thomas à Kempis, Bishop Launcelot Andrewes, and Beecher; and as representing the new sense of social aspiration and brotherhood, Walter Rauschenbusch. With such an introduction, a meeting may take its own course. The impression left is sure to be that of prayer as the means of entrance into the great and goodly fellowship of the world's largest souls.

CHAPTER VI

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS

Signs of the Times

At this service, especially if the service is in a large city, there may be hung about the room certain signs, with which the people are very familiar—signs that are for the protection of the people in their general intercourse, and yet signs which may bear a moral or religious significance. Take such signs, for example, which we are very familiar with in New York city, such as, "Watch Your Step," "This Way Out," "This Way In," "Pay as You Enter," "Shine Inside." Each one of these signs, when people are reminded of it, will bring a real message.

"Watch Your Step," that it may

lead you in the right direction, and that it may not lead others astray; "Pay as You Enter," so that you will not wake up in years to come, and find yourself in debt; and so each of these signs, and many others, which might be mentioned, may be used, not only to bring messages on that particular night, but may also tend to cause these people to remember lessons of that night whenever they read these signs again.

The Things That Jesus Likened Himself to in the Bible

The title of this service is explanatory in itself. Jesus likened himself to Bread, Way, Light, Vine, Shepherd, Door, etc. For this service the leader should announce at the service the week before that this was to be the nature of the service, and ask the people to look up references in the Bible, which refer to Jesus, or in

which Jesus refers to himself as like certain great, substantial things in this life.

The things to which Jesus likened his disciples may be helpfully grouped together, using the Bible references to Salt, Light, Friends, Leaven, Seed, Sheep, etc.

The Child in Our Midst

In preparation for this meeting the people are asked to interview children to find out their opinions with reference to God—as to who God is, where God lives, what God does, who God associates with, how God communicates with us, and how we with him. Two things will probably develop from such a service as this: it will be remarkable to see how nearly genuine is the simple faith of the child, and it may also tend to help the older ones to be more sympathetic with the view point of the child. Jesus said that

a little child should lead them, and unless we become as little children we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. Some people have never really understood these teachings.

The Midweek Reception

Certain ones are selected for this service to be at home to the members of the church, and they make provision for the service just as they might were they receiving in their own home; then they greet the people as they come, and conduct the service as though the people were their guests. Interest can be added to such a service if these people will send out "At Home" cards to the people of the parish, or, a better thing is to have each person who will send an "At Home" card to several others, who are not in the habit of attending the service, and then be there to greet them and make them feel at home.

How Men of the Bible Prayed

In his little book entitled The Meaning of Prayer Harry Emerson Fosdick has some splendid illustrations and references showing how various men of the Bible prayed—their posture, their attitude, their words, and spirit and prayer. This in itself forms the basis for a very suggestive service.

An interesting meeting can be developed in which such things as the following are considered:

Jesus's conversations.

Jesus's answer to questions.

Jesus as a debater.

The types of faith which Jesus met, and how he met them.

The types of doubt which Jesus met, and how he met them.

The Great Battlefields of the Bible

The greatest battlefields of the world

are in the heart. Biographical approaches to very common problems in everyday life may be had in a series of prayer meetings which take up "The Great Battlefields of the Bible." These would be experiences in the lives of men where they either conquered or were conquered by some great temptation or calamity. For example:

Christ in the Wilderness.

Saul and his fits of despondency. Also Elijah.

Job.

Solomon—the battle against domination by material possessions.

Moses, Daniel, Judas, etc.

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Luccock, H. E. ~~& Cook~~

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The Mid-Week Service

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